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SELECTIVE ADMISSION: THE CRUCIAL ISSUE IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

C. D. Deshmukh

IN INDIA, unlike many other countries, standards of higher education are a statutory concern of the central government, whilst other aspects of university education are the province of the states. This concern with the maintenance of satisfactory standards of teaching and research in institutions of higher learning has a historical background, for the establishment of universities in India under British rule a little more than a century ago was the result of initiative taken by the government.

In recent years the subject has come to the fore as a result of the recommendations of the University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, now Vice-President of the Indian Union, whose report was submitted to the government soon after the advent of independence. It was only natural therefore that the Constitution, which took effect in 1950, should have reserved to the Union government responsibility for "the co-ordination and determination of the standards" of higher education. In exercise of its statutory responsibility for these standards, the government established the University Grants Commission, which received funds from the Planning Commission so that it might advance the development of higher education to a point that would be regarded as satisfactory in relation to Indian standards of public expenditure on social services including education.

Of the many aspects of higher education to which the University Grants Commission devoted attention and applied the resources at its disposal, perhaps none has greater importance than the question of restricting admission to universities to young persons who appear likely to benefit from higher education. This question has emerged as a result of the belief of academicians and others that, more than any other factor, the pressure of vast numbers entering the universities and their constituent and affiliated colleges has led to a steady deterioration of standards, because of the inadequacy of the resources available for expanding, not to speak of improving, the apparatus of higher education. For instance, when the University Education Commission reported in 1948, the total number of young persons in colleges and universities in India was 275,000; by the end of 1950, it had risen to 420,000; and by the end of 1955, to 750,000. By now the number must exceed one million. And yet, public expenditures on the multifarious amenities that are essential for a sound system of higher education have not increased in proportion.

Perhaps some explanation is necessary of why numbers of this order are regarded as excessive for institutions of higher learning in a country of India's size. According to the latest (1961 Census) population figure of 438 million, the proportion of young persons in universities and colleges is a little less than 2,300 per million, whereas in the United States the corresponding proportion must be more than eight times greater, and ratios four or five times as high are not unknown elsewhere, including Japan, the Asian country that leads in this as in many other respects. Curiously enough, it is only in the United Kingdom that the proportion is somewhat similar to that obtaining in India, but here again there is a significant difference: viz., the span of primary and secondary education is two years longer than in India, and admission to the universities takes place only after very rigorous qualifying tests.

To put the matter in another way, of the one million young persons now in Indian universities and colleges, about one-third are studying in classes which in most countries of high educational standing would be regarded as a part of secondary education. If allowance is made for this situation, the real proportion for India becomes a little more than 1,500 per million of population, instead of 2,300. It is customary to consider Indian registration in universities and colleges not so much in relation to the total population as in relation to the literate population, which at present would seem to comprise about 30 per cent of the whole, or 131 million. According to this reckoning, the proportion of university or college students becomes 5,000 to one million instead of 1,500 to one million. This last calculation brings into relief the shape of the educational structure at the base of Indian higher education, and suggests that it is very much narrower than in most other countries.

ON THE ADVENT of independence the makers of the Indian Constitution observed that even primary education had made only uneven and halting progress under British rule--the percentage of children attending school between the ages of 6 and 11 being barely 40. They therefore included among the Directive Principles of State Policy a requirement that the states should endeavour to provide compulsory free education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 within ten years of the inauguration of the Constitution. But, despite special efforts, this goal has not proved attainable, and on the advice of the Planning Commission the state governments have set themselves a more modest objective, viz., the provision of compulsory free education for all children aged 6 to 11 by the end of the Third Five Year Plan in 1966. The percentages at the higher levels of primary and secondary education are correspondingly low, representing some 30 per cent of the 11-to-14-year group and about 15 per cent of the 14-to-17-year group. It is out of the last group that the institutions of higher education obtain their entrants.

Universities and colleges in India do not conduct special entrance tests or examinations. A mere pass in the school-leaving examination (generally called the matriculation or higher secondary examination) is, in theory, a sufficient minimum qualification for entrance. The percentage of passes in the matriculation or higher secondary examination approximates 50, which is to say that only half of the candidates in the highest class qualify theoretically. Of those who qualify, possibly one-third do not have the means--although all may have the inclination--to pursue higher studies. Since the span of primary and secondary education is notably shorter than elsewhere and since in existing conditions the students possessing school-leaving qualifications do not have that command of English that is necessary in most positions in the public or private sector, only those who have had at least two additional years of higher education have a chance of obtaining employment, and for a significant proportion of posts the minimum qualification is a first degree. Therefore almost everyone who has the means wishes to enter a university or a college so as to better his or her prospects of employment. At least in the more sophisticated urban areas and amongst the middle classes, a girl's marriage prospects are improved if she has a university degree.

The pressure of numbers is a result of these factors, and also of the steady expansion that is occurring throughout the country in primary and secondary educational facilities, even in remote rural areas, owing to the stimulus given by the government as well as to a genuine and rising popular interest in education. This pressure would not have made itself felt if the government had possessed the resources to construct, equip and staff universities and colleges or if its inadequate efforts had been supplemented by private organizations. Although both these agencies have made commendable efforts to meet the situation, the total resources at the disposal of the community have proved markedly inadequate, especially in view of the many other competing priorities not only in the field of social service but also in the general area of social and economic development.

In a country such as India, where social and economic development receives special attention through a series of five-year plans, the growing needs of the government for scientific and technological personnel may be expected to be a dominant factor in educational policy, and such, indeed, is the case in India. The concern of the government for enabling prospective employers to obtain the necessary qualified professional, scientific or technological personnel has been evidenced by special allocations in the series of five-year plans for establishing the requisite institutions or for increasing the proportion of students taking professional, scientific and technological courses as distinct from the arts or the humanities. Indeed, so vigorous have been government efforts in the former direction that many a medical or engineering college, constructed and equipped at great expense, is 30 or 40 per cent short of qualified teachers.

To remedy this situation, the teaching profession is being made more attractive by improving the emoluments of the faculties of these colleges, as well as by ad hoc measures such as the institution of special pedagogical courses, supplemented to a very small extent by the importation of teachers from the more advanced countries, particularly from the four countries that are extending special assistance to India in building up institutes of technology, viz., the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany and the U.S.S.R. The rather meagre existing system of scholarships is also being improved as far as resources permit so as to attract students to these special courses. During the Third Five Year Plan (i.e., by 1966) the number of students taking professional, scientific and technological courses is supposed to increase from the present 30 per cent to 40 per cent.

IN THE EXISTING circumstances, the competition for admission to professional and technological colleges is sufficiently severe to ensure that only first-class students will gain entrance. Even for the pure science post-graduate course in the universities, students who have scored higher than 60 per cent in the qualifying examination are available; it is only in the agricultural and veterinary colleges that students who score 50 per cent or better have a chance of being admitted. This statement must be qualified by reference to the practice obtaining in many institutions, especially in the South, which the state governments compel to admit students from backward communities even though they possess lower qualifications. It should be explained in this context that the system of examinations prevalent in India is of the year-end essay type, with no credits added for work done during the year under the guidance of the teacher. The higher educational authorities, in consultation with the University Grants Commission, are giving serious thought to reforming this system, and in time partial credit may be given for course work.

It has been said, probably with justice, that the prevailing system of university examinations puts a premium on memory, but even so the ordinary pass percentage for the first degree of Bachelor in Arts or Science is between 50 and 60. When it is recalled that for the school-leaving examinations as well a somewhat similar pass percentage obtains, one has some measure of the unsatisfactory standards of teaching and/or learning in Indian universities. It is possible to argue that if the physical apparatus of education is improved so as to introduce a stronger motivation for and a more diligent application to studies, there will be a marked improvement in this and similar pass percentages, but study of the relevant facts and figures has convinced Indian educationists that such improvement will continue to lag because of the indifferent quality of the students admitted to the universities.

One should perhaps note that there is no system of vocational guidance or personal counselling in vogue in India's schools, and

that, because of the country's backwardness in industrialization, most of those who obtain the first university degree seek some kind of government position. Since the total of such openings available each year is very much smaller than the number of new university graduates, there are always many such who are unsuccessful in obtaining employment and who are not particularly qualified to undertake other work by way of self-employment. It is possible that this may be a transitory state of affairs and that as India's industrialization advances there will be both less unemployment amongst university graduates and more choice of suitable employment available to them.

One might argue, in theory, that in a democratic society every young person who has passed out of school is entitled to an opportunity to prosecute his studies further if he desires to do so, but by and large this view does not have wide acceptance among educationists. They are aware that even in the United States, where at one time some such attitude was popular, most state universities have now had to resort to selective admission before the invading tide of numbers, and that today there are hardly five or six states in which the state universities are compelled by law to admit every young person who seeks admission with the necessary minimum qualifications.

The pros and cons of this issue have been thoroughly debated in India during the last few years. Most representative or authoritative bodies have reached the conclusion that admission to universities must be selective and be confined to candidates who have shown sufficient aptitude to indicate that they will benefit by a university education. There is, however, a powerful body of opinion to the contrary amongst politicians, particularly those who are responsible in some measure for the governance of the country, especially at the state-government level. It is here that the impact of the general public desire to extend widely the benefits of education to classes hitherto denied this opportunity makes itself felt, and since nearly all universities are dependent on finance provided by the government for both non-recurrent and recurrent expenditures, the attitude of the government of the day is a powerful factor in the situation. The result is somewhat of a deadlock, political pressure pulling one way and academic conviction another. The crucial issue affecting higher education in India is how to find a way out.

The writer has on more than one occasion proposed a solution, which has yet to be considered in detail by the various educational authorities concerned. That solution is that the stream of university education should be divided into an honours stream and a pass stream, only candidates of the requisite high talents and attainments, as may be specified, being admitted to the honours stream, whilst all possible facilities are provided for satisfying the aspirations of those not so gifted for not only an easier pass course but also a more diversified and shorter post-secondary

course of education. Only through such a device will it be possible both to meet and perhaps satisfy popular aspirations and at the same time to assure the nation of an adequate supply of the highly qualified academic talent that it will require for the manifold tasks of planned economic and social development.

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THE INDONESIAN IMAGE OF WEST IRIAN

Arend Lijphart

ON AUGUST 17, 1960, the fifteenth anniversary of Indonesia's Independence Day, the Indonesian government broke off diplomatic relations with the Netherlands. The United Arab Republic was asked to look after Indonesian interests in Holland, and the Dutch requested the United Kingdom to perform the same service for them in Indonesia. The Djakarta government decided to shut off even this indirect channel of communication in the early days of March 1961, which marked the lowest point in Indonesian-Dutch relations since the formal emergence of Indonesia as a sovereign state in December 1949.

After the transfer of sovereignty, the two countries had started off with a certain degree of optimism about their common future, but with a small reservoir of mutual understanding and cordiality. On the other hand, there was a high degree of mutual involvement in the political and economic spheres, and this soon put a heavy strain on their relationship. In the course of little more than a decade, Indonesian-Dutch contacts have been almost completely eliminated.

In the early 1950's many Dutch citizens left Indonesia, accompanied by a considerable outflow of Dutch capital. The Netherlands-Indonesian Union and other Round Table Conference agreements were abrogated by Indonesia in 1956. The events of December 1957 caused the large majority of the 50,000 Dutch nationals still living in Indonesia to leave. Dutch enterprises were put under government supervision, and subsequently nationalized. The discontinuance of both direct and indirect diplomatic relations between the two countries is the most recent in this series of events.

A complete absence of contacts might have a favorable effect on Indonesian-Dutch relations, because it might serve to assuage the bitter feelings on both sides. However, one important point of contact remains: the Dutch are still in West Irian (West New Guinea). The Irian dispute has been a major factor in the deterioration of relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia. At the moment, this controversy stands out not only as the single point of contact between the two countries, but also as the focal point for the whole array of anti-Dutch feelings in Indonesia.

At this stage, it may be useful to endeavor to assess the significance of West New Guinea to the Indonesians. It is not difficult to observe that for the Dutch the question of what policy to

follow regarding New Guinea has been a domestic political problem of the first order, but superficial appearances indicate otherwise in the case of Indonesia. The fact that the Indonesian people and their leaders are almost without exception united in their view that West Irian constitutes an inseparable part of Indonesia might suggest that they regard the New Guinea issue as essentially a simple matter. It is interesting that partisan observers on both sides strongly favor such an appraisal. The pro-Dutch amateur political realist is apt to see everything in terms of an adroit manipulation of the gullible Indonesian masses by their unscrupulous and power-hungry leaders. On the other hand, the uncritical Indonesia-phile interprets the Indonesian view as a clearly legitimate and morally justified national aspiration that could not possibly constitute an internal political problem for the Indonesians.

More thorough analysis reveals that such one-sided and oversimplified conclusions are far from the mark, mainly because they fail to consider the subjective and psychological factors behind the Indonesian standpoint and the necessity for distinguishing between the attitudes of the people toward the New Guinea issue and those of the political elite. It is undoubtedly true that there has been almost complete popular unanimity on the basic demand that West New Guinea be returned to Indonesia. Even more striking is the existence of this unity despite the fact that the objective merits of the case do not unequivocally favor the Indonesian thesis. An explanation must be sought first of all in the nature of Indonesian nationalism, in the identification of nationalistic and revolutionary sentiments, and in the total complex of feelings toward the Dutch.

THE FIRST IMPORTANT factor that must be considered when one attempts to understand the importance of West Irian in Indonesian politics is the character of Indonesian nationalism. The whole struggle of the nationalist movement before the Second World War was based on the concept of the unity and indivisibility of Indonesia. The South Moluccas rebellion and the revolt of the outer islands seem, to be sure, to point in a different direction. However, these movements are not nationalistic movements, but the expressions of a strong desire for greater autonomy, although mixed with resentment over Javanese domination. Both during the colonial period and at the time of the negotiations on the transfer of sovereignty, the Dutch constantly emphasized the separatist tendencies among the Indonesian people, and failed to appreciate the basic unitary character of Indonesian nationalism.[1]

Rather ironically, Dutch colonial rule in the Indies was a major factor in bringing about the connection between Indonesian nationalism and the territory of the entire former Netherlands East Indies. As in other colonized areas of Asia and Africa, the territory ruled by the Dutch colonial administration was the framework within which social change took place during several centuries, and

within which a feeling of common identity gradually developed that often cut across traditional boundaries. Consequently, the territorial dimension of Indonesian nationalism is clearly based on the areas of the archipelago, including West New Guinea, ruled by the Batavia government, in spite of some efforts to establish a link with the old empire of Modjopahit.

It should be understood that there is no clear criterion for the single national whole other than the common history of Dutch colonial rule. If West Irian were to be regarded as not essential to this national whole, the definition of national unity would cease to operate.[2] As a result, the exclusion of West New Guinea from the Indonesian state is seen as a constant threat of national disintegration. This danger seems even more acute because of the large number of different ethnic and linguistic groups and the many other centrifugal forces present on the Indonesian stage. It is understandable, therefore, that the major argument used by the Dutch to justify their presence in New Guinea is particularly ill received by the Indonesians. This contention--that the Papuans of New Guinea are a different race and a different people who must have the right of self-determination--indeed strikes at the root of Indonesian unity.

The geographical location of West Irian on the periphery of the Indonesian archipelago has increased rather than decreased its importance to Indonesian nationalism. Hogendorp points out that, as early as the 1920's, Indonesian nationalists used to talk about Indonesia in terms of an area extending from Sabang (in the northwest) to Merauke (in the southeast), and from Udjung Kulon (in the southwest) to Manokwari (in the northeast).[3] Two of these four basic points that symbolize Indonesian unity--Merauke and Manokwari--are in West Irian. Therefore, the inclusion of West Irian in Indonesia is the essential and final ingredient for the completion of the Indonesian national state in this special sense as well.

Moreover, Indonesian nationalism is closely identified with the Revolution and revolutionary struggle, so that nationalism and revolutionary fervor sustain each other. The fight for West Irian is a direct continuation of the Indonesian Revolution which led to formal independence in 1949. As the main objective of the continuing revolutionary struggle, it invigorates nationalistic sentiments.

There are also indications that West Irian has a specific symbolic value as a reminder of Dutch colonial oppression. The Boven Digul camp in West Irian was used before World War II as a place of exile for nationalist leaders. In a speech to Parliament in 1957, Foreign Minister Subandrio made the following significant remark: "The repression by the Dutch colonial administration of our people in West Irian and their bondage grow more severe. Hundreds, if not thousands, of our people in West Irian are confined in the colonial prisons there, and Boven Digul, as you know, has been re-opened by the Dutch in West Irian. These are things which

we cannot take lightly."[4]

West New Guinea is not only the ultimate territorial objective of the Indonesian Revolution; it also poses the danger of a possible reversal of the success hitherto achieved by the Revolution. The strategic significance of the island has been prominently used as an argument in the controversy. The Indonesian image of its strategic importance is intimately connected with the notion that the Dutch have Machiavellian designs for reconquering Indonesia with West Irian as the military jumping-off point, and thus for restoring the glory of the former Netherlands East Indies.

These fears are based, in the first place, on the memories of the long and bitter struggle for independence. Other sources of Indonesian fears have been the rebellious activities of the Darul Islam and the subversive disturbances in Eastern Indonesia. The continued resistance and strength of these movements are commonly attributed to foreign (i.e., Dutch) assistance. The aid allegedly given to the rebellion of the "Republic of the South Moluccas" is said to have a dual purpose, namely, the subversion of the Djakarta government and the use of Ambonese unrest as a pretext for a military reconquest of the Indies. These anxieties are reinforced by the geographical proximity of the Moluccas to West Irian. Concern over the growing armed strength of West Irian has been a constant feature of the dispute, particularly during the last few years. In 1960 the Dutch government again decided to send additional manpower and equipment, including Holland's aircraft carrier "Karel Doorman," to West Irian.

Each of these many events except the long revolutionary struggle, taken separately, could not have been of major importance. But when they are considered together, it is not very difficult for the average Indonesian to see a broad pattern in them that generates a widespread fear of Dutch aggressive activities, however ill founded and unrealistic such fear may be.

The attitudes, then, of the Indonesian people toward West Irian should be assessed in the context of the total complex of their feelings toward the Dutch. The revolution against the Dutch was accompanied by a glowing optimism about the future of an independent Indonesia. When these high expectations failed to materialize, it was easy to conclude that the revolution had not yet been won and that the continued presence of the Dutch--in New Guinea, and in Indonesian economic life until 1957--was the cause of all Indonesia's problems. The interdependence in Indonesian minds of the West Irian issue and Dutch economic domination is striking: since the Dutch are out for economic profits in Indonesia, this must be one of their major reasons for holding on to New Guinea. In spite of conclusive evidence to the contrary, The Indonesian Spectator asserted in 1957 that the Dutch regarded West Irian as "a land of unexploited plenty."[5]

Conversely, the powerful economic position of the Dutch in Indonesia has contributed to the strength of Indonesian feelings about West Irian. Sutan Sjahrir has stated that the Dutch "still occupy so predominant a position in Indonesian economic life. Thus, the West Irian question has become a critical issue."[6] In view of this basic feeling that the Dutch are everywhere obstructing Indonesia's progress, one can understand the angry reaction of the Indonesians to the Dutch contention that Holland is better suited than Indonesia to take care of the inhabitants of West Irian and to promote the development of this area.

ALTHOUGH the West Irian question has been an essentially uncomplicated matter and a unifying force for the Indonesian masses, it has created acute problems for the political elite. To a large extent, of course, the leaders have shared the prevalent subjective attitude based on nationalistic and anti-Dutch sentiments, but they have also been much more vulnerable to conflicting arguments and feelings. As a result, the Irian issue has caused a sharp ambivalence in the minds of the elite. For instance, they believe that Indonesia should be completely independent of all things Dutch, including Dutch thought patterns, but this search for independence clashes with an acute awareness and an underlying appreciation of their own intellectual heritage from the Dutch. Their compulsive efforts to achieve at least a level of performance respected by the Dutch are intensified by the fact that many difficulties have continued to plague Indonesia and have created deep anxieties about their own capabilities.

More specifically with regard to the West Irian issue, the Indonesian political leaders have been unable to dissociate themselves completely from arguments clearly at variance with subjective nationalistic sentiments. In the first place, they see that objectively speaking West Irian is not really so desirable. Moreover, especially the moderate politicians realize that many problems much more vital and pressing than the Irian question remain to be tackled in Indonesia. The argument that to some extent the Papuans of New Guinea constitute a special group among the peoples of the Indonesian archipelago is not entirely lost on them either. It is not yet generally known that during the second meeting in July 1945 of the Committee for the Study of the Preparation of Indonesian Independence (comprising Indonesian leaders appointed by the Japanese), three possibilities regarding the size of a future Indonesian state were discussed: (1) the Dutch East Indies plus a number of adjoining territories, such as Malaya, British Borneo, and Portuguese Timor; (2) the Dutch East Indies minus West New Guinea; and (3) the Dutch East Indies.[7] The inference is that the exclusion of West New Guinea from Indonesia was at least once regarded as a possibility.

The mental conflict appears very clearly with respect also to the fear of Dutch aggressive activities. The political leaders

must realize that a Dutch reconquest of the former colony is simply not feasible, and indeed that this whole idea is too unrealistic to be taken seriously. They must be aware also that Holland is a small, rather insignificant country on the world political stage. On the other hand, recognition of Holland's weakness makes the hard-fought revolution against the Dutch and the continuing struggle for Irian appear somewhat less brave and heroic.

These intellectual conflicts are intensified by the problems that political leaders usually have to face in states experiencing a transitional stage of development. The political elites in such countries must deal with a relatively undifferentiated public. There are few explicitly organized interest groups, and even these tend to be protective organizations that concentrate on the rule-application or output function of the government rather than on the rule-making or input aspect of the political process. Because the function of interest articulation is inadequately performed, interests can usually not be aggregated by a process of bargaining, and politicians at the national level have to resort to broad appeals which subsume the separate, largely unarticulated interests. Pye states: ". . . national leaders generally have to cast themselves in the role of representing a diffuse public, that is, the entire society. As a result, even when seeking to realize limited policy objectives, they may find it necessary to employ expressive oratory in order to mobilize support from an undifferentiated and unstructured public."[8]

Two specific patterns which such generalized and often highly emotional assertions follow are (1) strongly nationalistic appeals, and (2) a tendency to concentrate more, and to adopt more specific positions, on international than on domestic problems--a tendency that is strengthened by the fact that the international scene often appears more clearly structured than the national political arena.[9] In the case of Indonesia, agitation about West Irian fits both of these patterns. It is a problem at the international level, and at the same time it is a highly loaded nationalistic symbol.

The important point here is that the agitation about West Irian does not represent a consciously chosen policy employed by the Indonesian government to arouse the passions of the masses artificially in order to divert attention from domestic problems, as is often claimed. The inordinate amount of attention accorded the Irian problem in Indonesian politics arises instead from spontaneous popular sentiments and the political dynamics of a transitional society. On the whole, the leaders have highly ambivalent feelings on the issue. (In only a few cases--e.g., President Sukarno--a conscious identification with the "general will" and a rejection of all conflicting images has taken place.)

This mental conflict is apparent also with regard to the policy preferences of the different elite groups. Theoretically, the policy respecting West Irian could have ranged from complete neglect

of the issue to military conquest of the area. The more extreme groups (especially the Nationalist and Communist parties[10]) tend to favor a strong policy, but on the other hand are loath to see the problem eliminated altogether. The moderate groupings (the Moslem parties and the army) would welcome a solution to the problem but are opposed to extreme measures.[11] One result of this situation has been a continuation of the Indonesian Revolution with a growing momentum and very little guidance from the Indonesian leaders.

At the present time, the West Irian dispute is the only remaining point of contact between Indonesia and the Netherlands. A compromise on this issue involving anything less than a recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over West Irian is very unlikely in view of Indonesian popular feelings and the leaders' irresoluteness. Indonesia has sufficient military strength now to take West Irian by force. Holland's Foreign Minister J.M.A.H. Luns told the Second Chamber of Parliament on February 23, 1961, that his government had sound reasons for believing that a large-scale military attack by Indonesia on West Irian could be ruled out for the moment: "It must be clear to the Indonesians, too, that open armed aggression against Netherlands New Guinea for the realization of their territorial claims will be generally disapproved in the world outside the communist countries."[12]

It is, of course, unrealistic to expect a sudden large offensive without some kind of "incident" or "provocation." Minister Subandrio's recent statement that the boundaries between Indonesia and Dutch New Guinea are not clearly determined indicates that the occurrence of a border incident is not unlikely. Moreover, it would be a serious mistake to presume that the Indonesian government could firmly control any such development.

A climactic point has now been reached. The full strength of nationalistic, revolutionary and anti-Dutch feelings is now concentrated on the West Irian dispute. If nothing is done to avert the danger, some small incident may set off a disproportionate reaction, and serious armed conflict is then likely to ensue.

NOTES

1. See L. Metzemaekers, "The Western New Guinea Problem," Pacific Affairs, June 1951, p. 136. Most impartial observers would agree, however, that the Dutch correctly saw the need for a federal structure for the new Indonesian state. Unfortunately, precisely the fact of Dutch sponsorship has greatly reduced the likelihood of some kind of federalism being adopted.

2. For the same reason, it is highly unlikely that the Indonesians would lay claim to Eastern New Guinea. Such an action would be contary to the character of Indonesian nationalism.

3. T. J. Hogendorp, "Achtergrond van het Indonesische standpunt inzake Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea," Socialisme en democratie, February 1958, p. 132.

4. Subandrio, Normalization or Liquidation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, Djakarta, 1957.

5. "Indonesia's Bid for International Justice," The Indonesian Spectator, September 1, 1957, p. 17.

6. Sutan Sjahrir, "Problems and Difficulties of Indonesia," Far Eastern Economic Review, May 1, 1958, p. 559. (Emphasis added.)

7. Harry J. Benda has called my attention to these facts, given in S. Nishijima and K. Kishi, A Study of Japanese Military Administration in Indonesia (forthcoming).

8. Lucian W. Pye, "Communication Patterns and the Problems of Representative Government in Non-Western Societies," Public Opinion Quarterly, Spring, 1956, p. 255.

9. Lucian W. Pye, "The Non-Western Political Process," Journal of Politics, August 1958, pp. 482-83.

10. The Communist Party has also endeavored to make a cold-war issue of the Irian problem.

11. The following statement by former Vice-President Mohammad Hatta is indicative of the feeling of the moderate groups. He regretfully noted that "the all-pervasive influence of the West Irian question upon sentiment and politics has no little effect in retarding reconstruction," and continued: "Indeed, till the question of West Irian is settled, Indonesian politics will be more irrational than rational." See his article "Indonesia Between the Power Blocs," Foreign Affairs, April 1958, p. 489.

12. Verslag van de Handelingen der Staten-Generaal, 1960-1961, Tweede Kamer, p. 599.

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CAMBODIA'S NEUTRALITY AND THE LAOTIAN CRISIS

Roger M. Smith

IN THE AFTERMATH of the Indochina war, as a result of which Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were liberated from almost a century of French colonial rule, Cambodia alone has enjoyed continuous political unity and stability. This remarkable state of affairs, by no means inevitable, is to a major extent a consequence of the shrewdness and foresight of a single man, Cambodia's Chief of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Unfortunately, the end of French domination did not automatically erase the deleterious effects of that rule--political instability, a conspicuous dearth of experienced leadership, an underdeveloped economy, uneducated masses--and few were as keenly aware of this plight as the then King Sihanouk.[1]

Its identity as a nation long forgotten by the world, Cambodia, in order to regain its status as a proud and prosperous country, had first to rectify the ills born of French rule. This challenging task could best be performed, Prince Sihanouk believed, if for the next few years the attention of the country were focused inward. On numerous occasions the Prince has reiterated Cambodia's desire to be left alone and to remain free from ideological entanglement which would hinder internal development.[2]

While he has expressed the desire of his country to be left free to solve its problems, the Prince has made clear his country's willingness to receive unconditional assistance from the major powers. The economic benefits that Cambodia has obtained from the competitive attention of the two blocs are considerable. In addition, its neutrality has been strengthened by the competition, for neither side can now withdraw its aid without running the risk of forcing Cambodia's dependence on the other.

Prince Sihanouk has admitted on several occasions that his country's progress in raising its standard of living could not have been so rapid had it not received aid from more developed countries, in particular from the United States, China and Russia. But it should not be thought that mere expediency motivates Cambodia's policy of neutrality. The many years of French rule, and before that the centuries of encroachments upon its territory by the Annamese and Thai, have taught the Cambodians to keep a careful vigil over their newly won independence. They do not wish to restrict their own freedom by entering into any alliance or to risk losing their independence by favoring one bloc and thereby antagonizing the other.

While Prince Sihanouk has frequently castigated the imperialistic tendencies of the West (and especially of the United States), he fears absorption by the communist powers more than he fears the Western bloc. Thus, in a major policy speech in 1956 in which he outlined Cambodia's objectives, he stated: "I should first declare that now we cannot dispense with American aid without falling into the orbit of the communist powers--an event that would signal the end of our neutrality, and probably of our independence."[3] Why, then, has he directed fewer harsh words at the communist countries than at the United States? The reason is that the leaders of those countries have been shrewder and more subtle in dealing with Cambodia.

While the West has tended to regard Cambodia as relatively unimportant, China and Russia have never failed, since 1955, to turn a sympathetic ear to Prince Sihanouk's pronouncements; and when their own interests have not been at stake, they have been quick to express approval of his statements and proposals.[4] The contrast in the policies of the two blocs is well exemplified in their reactions, noted below, to Prince Sihanouk's proposal for a conference on the Laotian civil war.

Then, too, Cambodia's attitude toward the West has been complicated by its relations with Thailand and South Vietnam. For many centuries Cambodia suffered from the machinations of these neighbors, and it was fear of them that led it to seek the protection, and finally to accept the domination, of France. Now that the French yoke has been removed, Cambodia is uneasy about the greater military strength of its traditional enemies, made possible by American assistance.[5]

But if Cambodia has been more critical of United States policy in Southeast Asia, the fact remains that it is fearful of the expansion of communism. Many persons in the West have often interpreted Cambodia's silence on communist-bloc policy and its concurrent lack of restraint in criticizing American policy to mean that the country is pro-communist, or unneutral. But Sihanouk has stated in no uncertain terms that "a Prince and a former King must be well aware that the first concern of the Communists is to get rid of the King and natural elite of any country they succeed in laying hands on."[6]

HOW DEEPLY FEARFUL Cambodia is of the communist threat is revealed by its reaction to the Laotian crisis. Cambodia is disquieted by the strife in Laos because its continuation threatens Cambodia's own carefully fostered security--hence Cambodian condemnation of American policy.[7]

Not only is there danger that, in time, the fighting may irrupt onto Cambodian territory; even worse, prolongation of the conflict would assure the victory of the more skillful Pathet Lao over

the conventionally trained pro-Western army. Once the reins of the Laotian government were in the hands of the Pathet Lao, there would be a very real possibility of communist infiltration of Cambodia from Laos. Many Cambodians believe that their country would then be completely surrounded by hostile neighbors, one of them communist and the other two currently pro-Western countries that have long coveted its territory.

As long ago as August 1959, Prince Sihanouk publicly expressed concern lest the civil war in Laos explode into an international conflict.[8] In the Phnom-Penh press he criticized the United States for having sabotaged the neutral regime of Prince Souvanna Phouma, which, by lending support to a group of pro-Western politicians led by General Phoumi Nosavan, had induced the Pathet Lao to lay down their arms. Not only was the Prince indignant because the United States had interfered in Laotian domestic affairs, thereby helping to revive the civil war, but he was alarmed because he foresaw that its action would encourage the entry of communist countries into the struggle.

He invited the major powers to consider the possibility of making Laos a neutral "tampon" led by a government in which all political factions were represented. But his proposal was ignored (or overlooked) by both blocs, and, as expected, while Moscow and Peking protested vigorously against American interference, the United States increased its military aid to the pro-Western government and undertook the training of its army.

A year later, in August 1960, Prince Sihanouk reiterated his proposal at a meeting of ambassadors in Phnom-Penh, this time including Cambodia in the neutral tampon.[9] His plea coincided with a new development in the Laotian crisis. Captain Kong Lae, whose parachute battalion had been bearing the brunt of the fighting against the Pathet Lao, staged a coup against the pro-Western government and called on Souvanna Phouma to undertake negotiations with the Pathet Lao. In the following month the Prince pleaded before the United Nations General Assembly for the restoration of a neutral regime in Vientiane. He elaborated on the notion of a neutral tampon composed of Laos and Cambodia.[10] The establishment of such a tampon, he explained, would involve a withdrawal of foreign bases and, by implication, of military aid, and a joint undertaking by Laos and Cambodia not to participate in any alliance.[11] The major powers would be required to guarantee respect for the neutrality of both countries, and a commission of neutral nations would supervise the neutrality and arbitrate future differences that either country might have with its neighbors. (Uppermost in the Prince's mind were Cambodia's differences with South Vietnam and Thailand.)

The Prince's speech was warmly received but was not acted upon by either bloc. Shortly thereafter, General Phoumi's forces rallied from their setback in August and disrupted negotiations between

Prince Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao. In December 1960, as it appeared that Phoumi's army, equipped and supported by the United States, was taking the measure of the Pathet Lao, Russia began to supply the latter with arms, including heavy artillery.

As substance was being given to Prince Sihanouk's early fears by this Russian action, other nations were for the first time becoming aware of the seriousness of the Laotian conflict. Once again Prince Sihanouk tried to induce the great powers to take constructive steps to restore peace in Laos. He called for an international conference on Laos, for the threefold purpose of preventing the country's partition, finding means for the restoration of peace, and enabling the Laotians to choose a policy for their government to follow.[12] His letter proposing the conference was addressed to "the signatories of the Geneva Accords, 1954" (France, Great Britain, the USSR, China, North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos); to "the [member] nations of the International Commission for Supervision and Control of the Geneva Accords" (India, Poland and Canada); and to the "nations having a common frontier with Laos" (Thailand, Burma and South Vietnam). "Finally, the United States, which has consistently manifested an interest in the Kingdom of Laos, should participate in this Conference."

The proposal for a 14-nation conference was immediately supported by the communist bloc, Russia going so far as to suggest Phnom-Penh as the site for it.[13] But President Eisenhower's response was lukewarm and noncommittal;[14] and Great Britain expressed its preference for a revival of the International Control Commission to resolve the crisis.[15]

Meanwhile, with Soviet assistance the Pathet Lao were daily adding new victories to an already long list. Then, following the change in administration in Washington, Prince Sihanouk wrote to President Kennedy to urge his support for the conference.[16] The President replied that a conference at that time would be inopportune because, in the absence of unanimous agreement among its eventual participants, the result would be to "increase international tension rather than reduce it." He proposed instead that the Prince should support the Laotian King Savang Vatthana's appeal to Cambodia, Burma and Malaya to establish a commission charged with supervising a cease-fire.[17] Cambodia refused this invitation because it believed that the proposal had originated not in Laos but in Washington and that, in any case, the efforts of such a commission would be wasted inasmuch as the Pathet Lao had not been consulted concerning it.

As the West appeared to be stalling for time (why it is difficult to understand, as the passage of time favored the Pathet Lao), Prince Sihanouk began to despair of the conference, if indeed it should ever be held, achieving what it might have had it been convened when first proposed. For, the longer it was postponed, the more territory the Pathet Lao would gain--and the West

would come to the bargaining table in a relatively weak position. His comments on this subject, made in the course of a speech at the Faculty of Law in Phnom-Penh on March 14, 1961, are worth quoting at length:

> If one had deigned to interest himself in the solutions which I put forward at the [crucial] moments, it would have been possible to have a truly neutral Laos between the two antagonistic blocs. But because of the wish to have Laos aligned, in a "pro-Western" neutrality, the germ of true neutrality has been killed and the keys of the future have been given to a pro-communist neutrality.
>
> The present (and future) evolution of events in Laos will work only to the advantage of the Pathet Lao and to those who support it. Under such conditions, I am unable to see that the Socialist powers will persist in their support of my proposition for the effective and guaranteed neutralization of Laos. If, despite their advantage, these powers continue to support it, one must hope that they will sincerely consent to sacrifice their major advantages in the interest of world peace and for the survival of the Lao people in a free and united nation. But in this world conflict, is it reasonable to hope that the big powers will make a sacrifice gratuitously?

DESPITE HIS MISGIVINGS and a brief period during which he retracted his support for the conference,[18] Prince Sihanouk presided at its opening session in Geneva on May 16 and called upon the conferees to give their full attention to a guaranteed neutrality that would allow the Laotian people to live in peace.[19] His earnest plea for a constructive, non-partisan approach to a resolution of the Laotian conflict impressed the delegates and helped to create a conciliatory atmosphere during the first days of the conference.

The United States at Geneva abandoned its insistence on a pro-Western government, and expressed willingness to recognize a neutral one. Thus on this major point the U.S. and the communist powers were in agreement, and the dispute over the seating of the Laotian delegations, which had persisted to the eve of the conference, was settled. An Anglo-Soviet compromise solution, allowing the representatives of each faction to enjoy equal status at the conference on the invitation of any of the other 13 delegations, was accepted by the U.S., which initially had been willing to recognize only the Boun Oum delegation.

The crucial issue awaiting settlement (at the time of this writing) is the nature of the machinery required to restore and maintain peace and neutrality in Laos. So that all the powers might devote their full attention to this issue, Cambodia temporarily withdrew its proposal of a buffer-zone consisting of Laos and Cambodia. However, the head of the Cambodian delegation,

Foreign Minister Nhiek Tioulong, left the way open for some other power to introduce a similar proposal at the conference.

Prince Sihanouk's attempts to create a conciliatory mood among the leaders of the warring Laotian factions were, during the first week of the conference, unsuccessful. Keenly aware that any solutions arrived at by the conference would be meaningless without the support of the parties most immediately concerned, he pleaded with Princes Boun Oum, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong to meet with him in Geneva. Souvanna Phouma replied that he could not leave Laos before the end of May, and Boun Oum refused to discuss matters on equal terms with the neutralist and Pathet Lao groups. On its part, the Laotian National Assembly voted to recognize the Boun Oum cabinet as the legal government, and requested the Geneva Conference to accredit its delegation as the legal representatives of Laos.

It is interesting to note Prince Sihanouk's view of Prince Souvanna Phouma's contention that the Pathet Lao, while communist-supported, are not themselves communists. The Cambodian chief of state believes that the Pathet Lao are too deeply entangled with the communists to act independently, and he fears that, if events in Laos are allowed to take their own course, there will be nothing, in view of the weakened status of the Boun Oum government, to restrain the Pathet Lao. His stake in a neutralized Laos is revealed in the following statement: "In order to remain on good terms with my communist friends, we prefer not to have a common frontier with them."[20]

Phnom-Penh, May 24, 1961

NOTES

1. Prince Sihanouk abdicated as king in March 1955 in favor of his father, Prince Norodom Suramarit. The statement of his reason for abdicating appears in Agence Khmère de Presse, March 15, 1955.

2. The first such plea was contained in the "Government Declaration" of September 1953, on the eve of the attainment of independence. See Livre jaune sur les revendications de l'indépendance du Cambodge, II (Phnom-Penh: Imp. du Palais Royal, 1954), pp. 60-64.

3. Réalités cambodgiennes (weekly), April 14, 1956.

4. The communist bloc has not always been so considerate. At the Geneva Conference of 1954, it exerted every effort to subordinate Cambodia's interests to its own. It was only through tenacity that Cambodia was able to prevent the establishment of a communist enclave on its territory similar to that set up for the Pathet Lao in Laos. See Sam Sary, Sur les accords de Genève et les elections

générales au Cambodge (Phnom-Penh, 1955?), pp. 61ff.

5. This anxiety underlay the blistering criticism of the U.S.-supported arms build-up in Thailand and South Vietnam in 1960. See Neak Cheat Niyum (The Nationalist) (weekly), June 25, 1960.

6. Norodom Sihanouk, "Cambodia Neutral: Dictate of Necessity," Foreign Affairs, July 1958, p. 585.

7. In the Prince's opinion, American policy in Laos has served only to improve the chances for communist success. His view has been expressed in answers to questions submitted to him by the author on January 8, 1961, and in interviews with many correspondents who have visited Phnom-Penh recently, and has been echoed by Phnom-Penh newspapers, e.g., in La Dépêche du Cambodge, April 21, 1961.

8. Réalités cambodgiennes, August 15, 1959. The Prince repeated his proposal in the first issue of his own newspaper, Neak Cheat Niyum, September 12, 1959.

9. Agence Khmère de Presse, August 24, 1960.

10. Ibid., September 29, 1960. The text of the Prince's speech is in La mission aux Nations-Unies de S.A.R. Le Prince Norodom Sihanouk, chef de l'état du Cambodge (Phnom-Penh: Imp. du Ministère de l'Information, December 26, 1960), pp. 5-8, 37-39. Prince Sihanouk's commentary on his role at the U.N. is contained in a collection of articles by him entitled Rapport au peuple khmer au terme de mission en Amérique et aux Nations-Unies (Phnom-Penh: Imp. du Ministère de l'Information, 1961).

11. These details were given by Prince Sihanouk in a memorandum to U.N. Secretary-General Hammarskjoeld, the text of which is contained in Réalités cambodgiennes, December 9, 1960, and commented upon in Rapport au peuple khmer . . . , cit., pp. 94-103.

12. The text of his letter is contained in Réalités cambodgiennes, January 6, 1961.

13. The replies of Russia and China are given by Agence Khmère de Presse, January 11 and 17, 1961, respectively.

14. Ibid., January 26, 1961.

15. Ibid., January 17, 1961.

16. Ibid., January 29, 1961.

17. President Kennedy's letter and Prince Sihanouk's reply are contained in Cambodge aujourd'hui, No. 2, February 1961, p. 3.

18. The Prince withdrew his support for the conference upon being told by King Savang Vatthana in Luang Prabang on April 30 that it constituted an unwarranted interference by foreign powers in Laotian domestic affairs. The King later changed his mind. For a commentary on what took place in Luang Prabang, see Réalités cambodgiennes, May 6, 1961.

19. For the text of his speech, see Agence Khmère de Presse, May 24, 1961.

20. From an interview with Nice-Matin (France), May 16, quoted in Agence Khmère de Presse, May 23, 1961.

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE LAO ELITE

Joel M. Halpern

ITS URGENT TOPICAL IMPORTANCE ASIDE, Laos has many features to interest persons concerned with Asian problems generally and, in a broader context, those concerned with the development of newly sovereign nations. This land-locked country of approximately two million inhabitants possesses--on a small scale but often in exaggerated form--many of the problems facing emerging states elsewhere: a small hereditary elite; a lack of trained administrators; an indifferent peasantry; dissident minority groups; inadequate basic industries and exports; poor transportation and communications facilities; and an active communist party that has recently become a competing government.

Before its incorporation into French Indochina in the late nineteenth century, Laos had been in existence for more than 500 years in the form of several petty kingdoms of varying sizes. Today Laos is essentially a formal political entity, shaped by the history of French colonial expansion. Not only is the country not a cohesive geographic unit, but all the ethnic groups inhabiting it are found in greater numbers in neighboring countries, with the possible exception of the diverse indigenous tribal peoples (Kha), who lack a common culture.

In a sense the political independence of Laos has enforced its economic dependence. Several centuries ago the Lao were quite capable of ruling themselves and even of waging wars against their neighbors, but the present resources of the country are inadequate to sustain the complex apparatus and large bureaucracy that the smallest nation requires today. This inadequacy is particularly striking when to the normal burdens of administration and economic development are added those of maintaining an army and a police force. It may be noted in this connection that more Europeans have been on the scene in Laos in recent years than at any time in the colonial era. (In 1960 there were several thousand French and some 750 Americans in Laos, whereas in 1921 and 1950 the "European" population totaled 361 and 802, respectively.)

The social structure of Laos is a complex mosaic of many elements, the most clearly delimited of which are the various ethnic groups. The major ones are the valley-dwelling Buddhist Lao; their linguistic cousins, the tribal Tai (e.g., Tai Dam, Tai Lu); the aboriginal Kha; and hill tribes such as the Meo and Yao, originating in China. In addition, there are the urban minority groups--Chinese and Vietnamese, Indians, Pakistanis, and Europeans.

The Lao proper form the largest single ethnic group, constituting less than half of the population. They dominate the government and administration, although it is not certain that they form a majority of the population. Since the urban component of Lao society is rapidly changing, it is difficult to delineate the elite group with precision, but its members definitely share specific kinship, educational and occupational characteristics. On the other hand, there is considerable variation in their political associations, standards of living, and value systems. There are approximately 200 elite families.

The Lao occupy the major political offices and senior civil service positions. Most of the present Lao elite are either direct descendants of the old royal families of Champassak, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, or Luang Prabang, or of the courtiers who served these kingdoms. This situation is not particularly surprising, for when the French occupied Laos they attempted to make use of the existing administrative structure and officials. As a consequence, it was to be expected that the children of the traditional elite would have preferential access to the limited educational facilities. At the time, there existed only the small group of urban elite, the Lao peasantry, and the tribal peoples. No important Lao merchant group apart from the traditional elite has yet developed. The traditional elite rarely engaged directly in large-scale commerce.

Although the French did not provide widespread educational facilities in Laos, they did send certain selected members of the royal family and high nobility to study in France before the second World War. Today members of this small group occupy key government positions. Among those who studied in France were the late king and the present monarch as well as the late viceroy Prince Phetsarath, his brother the "neutralist" leader Souvanna Phouma, and their half-brother Prince Souphanouvong, the leader of the communist Pathet Lao. The small size of this group is emphasized by the fact that until World War II fewer than a dozen Lao had received the equivalent of a full college education, although a somewhat larger number had studied in France for briefer periods. Without question, any Lao who studied in France before the second World War would be classified as a member of the elite, even though there are a number of important members of the elite who did not have this opportunity. In any case, they have all been strongly influenced by French culture, and the ability to speak and write French fluently is one of the marks of membership in the elite.

Almost without exception all members of the elite were educated at the Lycée Pavie (formerly a collège, or junior high school) in Vientiane and subsequently served in the civil service. Even today the Lycée provides only slightly more than the equivalent of an American high school education. As a marginal provincial outpost of the French colonial empire, Vientiane's educational standards appear to have lagged considerably behind those in metropolitan

France, in part because of the difficulty of recruiting qualified personnel to live in what was essentially an isolated provincial town.

The most significant fact about the Lycée, as indeed about all secondary education in Laos, is that classes are conducted almost entirely in French by French teachers. The sole exceptions are courses in Lao language and literature, which have only the status of a foreign language like English. Attempts by the Lao government to change this situation have been unsuccessful because of the shortage of qualified Lao to replace French teachers at the Lycée level. Under the prewar educational system pupils began studying French in the first grade. After six years of elementary school, education was continued in the collège and finally in the Lycée. One must still pass an examination in French before continuing beyond the sixth grade.

Not a few of today's elite received little more than nine years of formal schooling, after which they entered the bureaucracy. Some received advanced training in technical specialities, such as medicine, forestry or education, in French schools in Cambodia or Vietnam. Several government ministers began their careers as foresters, medical assistants, or school teachers.

Upon completion of their education, students entered the government as local district administrators or as sub-professional technicians or specialists. Thus a Lao trained in medicine in Hanoi (un médecin indochinois) could do valuable work in a hospital, but was limited to serving as an assistant to the resident French doctor. Today the French physicians in most of the Lao provincial hospitals still handle the more technical tasks such as surgery. In the same way, a Lao teacher can become principal of an elementary school, but generally he lacks the background for teaching at a collège or the Lycée.

An additional characteristic shared by most members of the Lao elite has been their participation in the Lao Issara movement. This independence movement was apparently catalyzed originally by the Japanese occupation of Laos at the end of World War II, and was inspired by the dynamic leadership of Prince Phetsarath, involving the traditional elite other than the royal family (formerly the royal house of Luang Prabang).

According to available information, during the prewar period there was no serious opposition to French rule on the part of the valley Lao. Unlike the Meo and Kha peoples, the Lao in the valleys never actively rebelled. A partial explanation for this may be that certain areas, such as the Kingdom of Luang Prabang, enjoyed a semi-autonomous position, the French acting only indirectly through local officials. When the French reoccupied Laos in 1945, there were some brief skirmishes between the returning French troops and the Lao Issara, but there does not appear to have been

determined or prolonged resistance or subsequent guerrilla activities, as there were in neighboring Vietnam. Of the large proportion of Lao elite who sought asylum in Thailand, most returned within the next year or two as the French gradually made concessions.

AS THE NATIONAL ECONOMY of Laos has developed in the years since the achievement of formal political independence, members of the elite have moved into profitable business alliances with the Chinese and European merchant communities. This is usually a mutually advantageous situation, since there are severe government restrictions on most alien-owned and -operated businesses, particularly those controlled by Chinese and, to a lesser extent, by Vietnamese. (The French, however, are allowed certain privileges.) At the same time, most Lao lack the technical experience and international contacts necessary for operating either export-import firms or manufacturing enterprises independently. Many prominent Lao officials now own interests in banks, airlines, movie theaters, hotels, sawmills, construction firms, and bus and trucking companies, and have acquired a substantial economic base outside the government. Much of this economic expansion has resulted directly or indirectly from the American aid program. Such opportunities did not exist when Laos was a colony--an important point, since large individual landholdings are unknown in Laos; even the royal family owns extensive agricultural land in but a few villages in the neighborhood of the royal capital. (It is true that in principle the royal family also owns large tracts of forest land, but the income from these is not large.)

The Lao elite has a monopoly on the highest civil service positions and most important political offices. These two categories overlap. That is, a man who occupies the highest civil service rank--for example, as governor of a province--may enter politics and run for the National Assembly. If elected, he can be appointed a minister or secretary of state for a particular department; if he loses, he can re-enter the civil service. It is not necessary, however, for a minister to have been elected a deputy. The province from which a deputy is elected may be one in which he has served as a government official, and not necessarily his place of birth or even permanent residence.

Along with the development of Laos as a nation, the elite has evolved as a group with a national orientation. This has been true even though their family ties and power were originally based in the provinces (except for those whose home was in Vientiane). In the past there has been some conflict between the north and the south, mainly between the descendants of the kingdoms of Luang Prabang and of Champassak. Although this rivalry appears to have been very much muted in recent years, one can still hear frequent complaints to the effect that sufficient economic progress has not taken place in the provinces compared to the city of Vientiane, or

that one section of the country has been favored over another. Most of the elite appear to have originated in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Champassak, with relatively few coming from Xieng Khouang and only a limited number from such provinces as Khammouane and Savannakhet. No members of the Lao elite trace their origin to Nam Tha, Phong Saly, Sam Neua, Attopeu or Sayabouri; except for the last province, which was formerly part of Thailand, all these areas are overwhelmingly non-Lao.

If one examines the background of the deputies from these latter provinces, it is possible to find many cases of elite officials who have served there and then run for office. While there may be, for example, a few individuals who were originally from Vientiane Province, served for a long time in Luang Prabang, and then proceeded to run for office from the latter area, such cases are relatively unusual. Like many other members of the Lao elite, most of the Pathet Lao deputies have run for office in their birthplace.

Even in traditional Lao society an outstanding individual could rise in the class hierarchy if he came to the attention of the king or some other royal personage and received a title. There are examples of this mobility in present-day Lao society, but they appear to be relatively few. One of the generals in the Lao army is the son of a farmer, and a provincial governor came from a family of fishermen; in both cases, however, they married members of the hereditary elite. Today their children are fully accepted. A very few members of the elite are said to be of tribal origin (including Captain Kong Lae, who staged the revolt against the royal government in the summer of 1960--but his wife is reported to be related to one of the traditional elite). Once they adopt Lao culture, participate in the French-influenced educational system, and rise in the Lao hierarchy, they appear to be accepted. Acquired culture traits rather than ethnic and racial origins are the determining factor. Both the children of Lao-Chinese marriages and Lao-French métis are accepted, but neither appear to gain particular prestige as a result of their origin. The wife of a former prime minister is a métisse, and some present and former ministers have European wives.

Almost all those who have entered the ranks of the elite were either born or brought up in urban or semi-urban areas. It has been virtually impossible for an individual from a marginal rural district to become a member of the elite, for, as indicated earlier, one of the reasons the elite tended to be self-perpetuating was the restricted access to the limited educational opportunities; these in turn were the key to government employment and hence the means to social mobility. Neither trade nor the priesthood offered this opportunity. Once an individual managed to achieve at least nine years of education, no insurmountable barriers blocked his way upward in the bureaucracy. Yet achieving even this modest education was next to impossible for a villager, since he either had no access to primary schools, or the ones he attended offered inferior

training in French--the absolute prerequisite for further education.

Ties of kinship can have very important political implications. Many family bonds exist between the Pathet Lao and important members of the royal Lao government, the most famous example being the half-brothers Prince Souvanna Phouma, the late Prince Phetsarath, and Prince Souphanouvong (the first two having had the same mother). Kinship ties extend into the police and army as well. It is certainly significant that Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong were the principal negotiators in arriving at the initial accords in 1957 between the royal government and the Pathet Lao. Their cooperation subsequently broadened, so that they are now both aligned against the royal government.

In part derivative from these kinship ties is a shared standard of living among the elite. This is based also on their common participation in business affairs. Thus one individual may be a government minister, a brother the owner of a construction firm, another brother a senior civil servant, and a close relative the proprietor of a manufacturing enterprise. These family connections naturally influence government attitudes and regulations toward business.

Kinship ties beyond the immediate family exist, but they are not necessarily accompanied by strong social or economic obligations. While positions are inherited, the behavior of children is not expected to adhere to rigid patterns. Lao Buddhist concepts place a great deal of emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for his own actions. This attitude, combined with flexibility of family ties, provides room for compromise and accommodation so characteristic of the Lao.

In this connection, the reaction of the elite to Prince Souphanouvong is interesting. His leadership of the group opposing the royal government was not condemned in terms of disloyalty to his branch of the royal family or to his elder half-brother the viceroy, but rather because he failed to behave with the decorum expected of a prince and had married a Vietnamese. Following the pattern of the three brother-princes, in no case do families seem to have split because individuals became members of the Pathet Lao. This is not to say that family ties were stronger than politics, but rather that the Lao do not seem to view these as conflicting loyalties. Being a Lao and member of the elite is more important than specific kinship or even political associations. But even these group feelings are not extremely strong or rigid.

Much of the favoritism that exists within the government reflects the implicit feeling that since the government is dominated by the elite it should primarily benefit them as a group. Persons who are not members of the leading families have not been harshly dealt with, although they may have been denied certain privileges.

Despite the tremendous corruption of recent years (freely and frankly acknowledged by the Lao), no members of the elite have been imprisoned. This failure to police themselves may be regarded as a consequence of the refusal of the Lao elite to accept ultimate responsibility for their own actions. A country supported almost entirely by a foreign power is unlikely to develop a sense of responsibility very quickly.

ANY COMMENTS ON contemporary Lao political alignments run the risk of being quickly dated. An attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to define certain types of structural and behavioral patterns that characterize the Lao elite. Although many of these patterns will continue to be severely modified in the future, they nevertheless provide a background against which to view future developments. It is possible at this point to draw some fairly substantial conclusions from recent events in Laos.

Neither the traditional political system from which the Lao elite derives nor the imported French administrative institutions have proved adequate to implement the basic economic and social changes essential for political stability. The Pathet Lao, led largely by disaffected members of the traditional elite, have been able both by internal subversion and by military means to set up a rival government in at least three of the 12 provinces while controlling portions of many others. Like the royal government, they have received very substantial outside aid, but in their case principally from North Vietnam and more recently from Russia. (Significantly, the Chinese have remained in the background.)

A major reason for Pathet Lao successes is their policy of recruitment of leaders of the non-Lao tribal groups, promising these non-Lao full equality and respect for their cultural uniqueness. It is highly significant that of the areas under Pathet Lao control at the time of writing (mid-May 1961), only about one-third of the population of Xieng Khoung, ten per cent in Phong Saly and virtually none in Sam Neua are ethnic Lao.

On the other hand, the elite in the royal government, imbued with a traditional attitude of superiority toward these tribal peoples, have been able to offer them only the alternative of "Laotianization," and even this policy has not been pursued aggressively. The new value systems and behavior patterns of the royalist elite, for which United States aid is in part responsible, have widened the economic gap between the elite and the rural people, Lao as well as tribal, and at the same time have increased the distance in attitudes between the elite and the Buddhist priesthood, while the Pathet Lao have sedulously cultivated the sympathies of the peasantry and of the priesthood.

Moreover, since the commencement of the civil war last year, the royal government has repeatedly appealed to its administrators

and army officers for support and has called on the population to remain true to its traditions and to oppose alien influence. The responsible elite, in other words, has relied mainly on traditional means for countering subversion and has looked hopefully to the past. On their part, the Pathet Lao have directed their appeals to the monks and the tribal peoples and to "persons of all classes," even to such unorganized groups as intellectuals, workers and youth. The Pathet Lao confidently envision a shining future for Laos, in contrast to the royal government, whose deepest loyalty appears to be to outmoded cultural patterns. The ideology offered by the Pathet Lao and their associates is not irresistible, to be sure, but at least it is an ideology that holds some promise for the future, whereas no viable forward-looking alternative has been presented by the royal government. In the writer's opinion, the conclusion is clear: the traditional elite that has controlled the royal government has failed to adapt itself to the demands of the present situation.

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